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LOUIS H. STEPHENS.

WE do not propose to speak here at length of mere animal portraiture, nor of the fortuitous introduction of animals in pictures of human incident or of natural scene. Often they are used for the sake of variety, or of verisimilitude. Sometimes they help the story, as in "The Bishop" print in "The Dance of Death" series, in which the sheep, as the shepherd is struck down, are scattering in all directions. In sacred art they have a legendary significance. Such is the connection of the lion with St. Mark, and of the bull with St. Luke. The use of animals in Egyptian mythology influenced their employment in Christian art. They figure without any purpose except that of ornament in the margins of illuminated manuscripts. The great landscape painters know where to put their herds and flocks. Symbolic heraldry is full of mysterious creatures, fabulous and compound, mostly as much manufactures as the showman's mermaid.

The use of animals in fable has been partly determined by actual or imaginary qualities of character, and partly by supposed resemblances to the human physiognomy. The ass has probably been more commonly used by the fabulists, on account of his assumed stupidity, his humility, and his heavy and doltish appearance. The dog, the cat, the rat, the cock, have the preference of domesticity. The lion has had the benefit of his royal appearance, and although, as zoologists have determined, he is without any kingly traits of disposition, he has persistently figured as the monarch of beasts. For some reason, not easily determined, the goose has become the representative of natural silliness. The monkey is entitled to his reputation for mischief. The ant is, with equal justice, made the representative of assiduity and prudence. With the conventional notions of the physiognomies of animals the imagination has probably much to do. In the same way we think that we discover resemblance to animal faces in those of men and women. Thus it was said of the poet Wordsworth that he had a face like a horse, while President Van Buren's countenance was not inaptly compared to that of a fox.

As in the earliest religious animals received something like divine honors, they soon made their appearance upon monuments, tombs, and in mural painting and sculpture. They seem to have been thus reproduced less for artistic than mythological reasons. Their use in apologue is very ancient, and appertains to the earliest literature of India and Greece. It received illustration as art advanced, as a natural appurtenance, and, by the great variety of subjects which it offered, and their popular character, made a distinct province for itself.

The effort, however, to give a distinct moral character to animal figures did not come until long afterwards. Even in Bewick, admirable as his figures are, there is but little of this. His birds and beasts are well and naturally drawn, but they do not act. The same is true of Granville, and measurably of Kaulbach. In Landseer there is more of dramatic character, but the expression of his animals depends upon their surroundings.

The drawings of Mr. Louis H. Stephens, an American artist who died in 1882, seem to us to have a decidedly original character. The books which he illustrated have become scarce, but he was well deserving of a fresher remembrance than he is likely to secure. A great deal of his industry was wasted upon caricature of merely temporary and local interest, and in drawing for weekly newspapers. For what he could do best, and with the greatest pleasure to himself, there was little or no demand. While *The Riverside Magazine* lasted he was a constant contributor, and he did for it some of his best work, and some of his designs were printed in *The Young Folks*, a similar publication. He illustrated two fine imperial quarto volumes, "The Death and Burial of Cock Robin" and "A Frog He Would a Wooing Go," for which his designs were admirably lithographed by Bien; and he painted three or four important pictures in water-color, including "The Black Art," which when it was exhibited attracted much attention. He projected, with his brother, the comic weekly, *Vanity Fair*, which lasted only two or three years and failed for want of public support, notwithstanding it was by far the best publication of the class which we have had or are likely to have. It was printed during the Rebellion, and afforded ample motives for satirical drawing, but we do not think that was Mr. Stephens' strongest point. He could draw dudes, vagrants and Members of Congress very well, but not very much better than some others. We doubt if his heart was much in this kind of work. He loved the meadows, the woods, the barnyards and their denizens. He preferred to make pictures for nursery ditties. He had a passion for the grotesque and the bizarre. In this and in his fondness for crowding his drawing with small figures he bore no slight resemblance to Cruikshank when that master was in an imaginative mood, as he was when producing the remarkable frontispiece to the "Table Book," which contains a portrait of himself. Such pictures presuppose painstaking and patient handling and a talent for getting large effects from minute detail. A good specimen of Mr. Stephens' cleverness in this way will be found in his illustration of "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son," in *The Riverside Magazine*. The hubbub of the piece is amazing. No theft of a single pig ever made such a sensation before. Scores upon scores are looking down from house tops and out of lofty windows. It is a veritable tempest in a teapot—a rustic riot.

If Mr. Stephens' lines had fallen in present places, there would have been a plenty of employment for his pencil. But when he was in his prime, and capable of his strongest, the present public taste was yet to be formed, and the American school of wood engraving was yet in its infancy, nobody having done anything remarkable except Anderson, who was substantially an imitator of Bewick. *Harper's Magazine*, for which Mr. Stephens made a good many of his early designs, had not then attained, in its woodwork, the present finish and elegance to which competition has forced it. Yet while Mr. Stephens was thus engaged he continued to advance in his art. He loved it for its own sake, apart from public recognition, and went on in careful and

persistent study, and with an eye always open to natural models.

It seems a pity that an artist of such distinct and peculiar genius should be forgotten. It is greatly to be wished that a selection of his best drawings should be published in a form calculated to preserve his memory, especially as it is no longer easy to secure them. Whenever they appear at book sales there is usually a brisk competition for them, but they pass into private collections and are out of the reach of the general. A moderate reproduction of the finest, at a reasonable price, would give pleasure to a great many people and would serve to secure the remembrance of a gifted and excellent man.

AN ILL WIND.

IT is an ill wind that blows no one any good, and the present financial depression and consequent stagnation in the picture market ought not to be considered an unmitigated evil by the artists, since it has burst a bubble whose iridescent hues have for a long time deceived many people into becoming patrons of foreign art work, when otherwise they would have been interested in the art of their own country. The first steps in the growth of art are always in the line of portraiture, and there is no thought of any future realization of the money invested; but later on, when a taste for other kinds of art work is being developed, there is a natural desire that the pictures purchased shall have a market value that can be realized at any time; and this feeling has been adroitly worked upon by our foreign dealers, whose assertions have been implicitly believed, that their pictures were even better investments than gold or diamonds, as at any time they could be sold either here or in Europe for a large advance on their cost, and for a number of years their words have been borne out by facts. Like some fancy stocks, when many want to buy and few to sell, the prices advanced with every sale, and it appeared as if there were to be no end to the boom. But the end came the moment that the buyers were few and the sellers many, a condition due partly to the hard times, and partly to the fact that the high prices were of an unnatural, hot-house growth, and also that confidence in the genuineness of foreign pictures has been much shaken by the exposures of the past year; and it is now manifest, by the low prices obtained at recent sales, that foreign pictures, purchased at high prices from New York dealers, are by no means the safe and productive investments they have long been supposed to be. A reaction is now setting in, and many of our hitherto exclusively foreign art collectors declare, that they will buy no more foreign pictures, but will examine into the claims of American art work, and give encouragement to those of our artists who in their opinions deserve it, and who have been hitherto thoughtlessly ignored. That is all that any of us ought to desire, and it is the only course that will result in the building up of a school of art that will be an honor to the country and a credit to those who have thus assisted in its development.

—A.

ONE OF OUR JUDGES.

AMOST remarkable book is Mr. Conway's*, with its three-fold contents—"History of the Woodcutters, Catalogue of Woodcuts, List of Books Containing Woodcuts." With the second and third divisions I do not meddle. They will be very interesting to bibliographers; and, I have no doubt, are not only carefully (that is evident), but accurately done. So far the book is probably a valuable addition to our stock of catalogue knowledge. But of the first part, professing to be history and criticism, something has to be said by a woodcutter.

Strangely inappropriate is the title of the book—"The Woodcutters of the Netherlands"—and also that of the first part—"History of Woodcutters"—since there are no woodcutters visible in the history. Notwithstanding, the table of contents to Part I. contains the following :

Chapter II.—The First Louvain Woodcutter, The Utrecht Woodcutter, The Bruges Woodcutter.

Chapter III.—The First Gouda Woodcutter, The Second Gouda Woodcutter, The First Antwerp Woodcutter.

Chapter IV.—The Haarlem Woodcutter, The Same Workman, or His School, at Antwerp; The Third Delft Woodcutter of This School.

Chapter VI.—The First Zwolle Woodcutter, The Second Zwolle Woodcutter.

Chapter VII.—The Second Delft Woodcutter and His School.

Chapter VIII.—The Brussels Woodcutter, The Second Louvain Woodcutter, The Third Louvain Woodcutter.

Chapter IX.—The Third Gouda Woodcutter, The Fourth Gouda Woodcutter, The First Leyden Woodcutter, The Second Leyden Woodcutter, The First Schoonhoven Woodcutter, The Second Schoonhoven Woodcutter.

Chapter X.—The Second Antwerp Woodcutter, The Third Antwerp Woodcutter.

And in an *Appendix*—Arend de Keysere's Woodcutter.

After such an array, all between 1475 and 1500, has not the reader a right to look for something about these twenty-three men? Something personal, even; that at least we may know the name of one, or the monogram of another. Our author has not a single word to say of one of them. They are all men of buckram. What he means by this list is simply that he will speak of *the cuts* printed at Louvain, Bruges, Antwerp, etc., etc., and he chooses, without any ground for doing so, to attribute the work printed in each place to a separate woodcutter.

It is curious that a book (or only the most prominent and important part of a book) should contain nothing of its own "contents"; but, beyond noting the curiosity, I may let that go. My business is with what the book really does contain, which is, instead of any history of wood-cutters, very much rambling criticism of wood-cuts, judged of in a most remarkable and not altogether unusual manner.

To begin: Mr. Conway (plainly a poor follower of Mr. Ruskin—his speech bewrayeth him) informs us that "the

*The Woodcutter of the Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century; by William Martin Conway. England: the Cambridge University Press.